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ABSTRACT

Since the 1960s, dominance of public school community interactions has shifted from school professionals to citizen groups, volunteers in the schools, community agencies and the business community. Evidence of this trend can be discerned from the ongoing Urban Education Studies project, which has school systems in the Council of The Great City Schools and has made site visits to Atlanta, Dallas, Toledo, Milwaukee, and Oakland. Mandated citizens' councils continue to operate with varying degrees of effectiveness alongside the more traditional Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.). Cities involved in desegregation plans have been court mandated to form even more citizens' groups. Volunteers have increased, expanding their activities to classroom assistance to a greater degree than in the past. Alliances with community agencies have taken different forms, some city agencies being housed in the same buildings as schools. Science centers and art museums have developed new collaborative arrangements. The most striking developments have been those of the business communities' involvement, particularly in desegregation plans, and placement of high school students in work situations. Site visits have shown that school personnel are realizing that they need the support and decision-making input from a wide audience within both the school and the community, in order to achieve the goals of the school. (Author/KR)

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URBAN EDUCATION: PROGRESS TOWARD RENEWAL AND REFORM

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN SCHOOL/COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS

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URBAN EDUCATION: PROGRESS TOWARD RENEWAL AND REFORM

ABSTRACT
Significant Development in School/Community Interactions

(Symposium, Division A - March 30, 1978, AERA, Toronto, Candada)
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School Community Interactions have existed in some form since the creation of public schools. For most of the history, however, the appropriate form of this interaction was determined largely by the school professionals. Since the 1960's, however, there has been a shift in the dominance by the school professionals due in large measure to two trends: one grew out of the Civil Rights movement and community control advocates initiated by parents and other community groups to make schools, especially those in urban areas serving minority children, more responsive; and second, the involvement of the federal government in schools with massive aid tied with a mandate that a citizen's committee be created in order for the local community to receive the funds.

The Urban Education Studies project is attempting to describe school community interactions through surveys of the school systems in the Council of The Great City Schools and site visits to five cities: Atlanta, Dallas, Toledo, Milwaukee, and Oakland, California.

From the visits, several trends were discerned. The mandated citizens councils continue to exist operating with varying degrees of effectiveness along side the more traditional Parent Teacher Association. In those cities now involved in desegregation plans (Dallas and Milwaukee in particular) the court has mandated citizens groups in addition to those already in existence. In Dallas the involvement has been quite extensive. Volunteers have increased, expanding their activities to assistance in classrooms to a greater degree than in the past. Alliances with community agencies continue again in different forms e.g., in Atlanta the Kennedy Center houses in the same building offices of the major city agencies along with a middle school, a day care center, and classes for handicapped. Cultural institutions like the Chabot Science Center and Museum School in Oakland Art Center in Milwaukee have developed new collaborative arrangements.

The most striking new development is that of the business community and schools, especially in Dallas and Atlanta. The Chamber of Commerce nas assumed a leadership role in enlisting support and involvement with the Dallas desegregation plan; in Atlanta an interagency council has been formed at one school through which high school students are placed in work situations.

There is some evidence from these site visits, that the school people are beginning to change their attitudes realizing that they need support of the total community to achieve the goals of the schools. There is a willingness to open the decision making process to a wider audience both within the schools and without. These small beginnings may be an indication of what could be part of the answer to the problems facing urban schools - so that young people can be prepared for a changing world.

School/Community interaction has existed in some form since the creation of a public school system. In a democratic society, which America professes to be, public institutions are expected to be both representative of and responsive to their constitutencies. Schools are no exception. What has changed over the years is the nature of that interaction as both schools and communities have responded to the social, political, and cultural changes in the society. Conflicts have emerged as the public school system has attempted to fulfill the many purposes society has assigned to the schools. Such is the nature of a democratic society which attempts to make it possible for all citizens to have access to the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as guaranteed by the Constitution upon which the government and society are founded.

As schools became more professional in their leadership, the nature of appropriate school/community interaction was largely determined by the professionals. As long as the community being served and the school professionals agreed on the purpose of education and held similar expectations as to how to achieve those purposes, schools could carry out their responsibilities with the support of that community. In such communities, channels of communication could be established since values and beliefs were similar. All spoke the same language. There was evidence over the years that children did learn and became productive citizens in these communities. Moreover, the school professionals were accountable to the power structure.

Unfortunately, there were (and still are) too many places where this mutually supportive system did not exist. During the 1960's, these

conflicts in values and expectations were heightened, often erupting in open conflict, that led to bitterness and hostility. Where desegregation plans were proposed, communities were often polarized because communication channels had not been established. In these communities, the people and school professionals did not speak the same language.

As many citizen and community groups took the initiative to try and force schools to become more responsive to new voices, the government (especially at the federal level during the days of the Great Society) adopted new legislation, rules and regulations designed to help formerly excluded groups become part of the power structure in local communities. The most publicized form of this activity was the Citizens Advisory Council or Committee now required in almost every federally-assisted education bill.

But there have been and are other modes of operation that can be categorized under the title of school/community interaction. One purpose of the present Urban Education Studies project is to describe and make some assessment of these activities. While it may be too early in this study to make definitive judgment of the effectiveness of present day citizen/parent/community participation in the operation of schools, there are several discernible trends from the preliminary studies and site visits to five cities: Dallas, Toledo, Milwaukee, Oakland, and Atlanta. In addition to the government mandated councils, more traditional forms of parent-teacher organizations continue to exist in most communities. New areas of interaction include the involvement of the business communities; an increase in volunteers in the schools; community schools and collaboration with other community agencies. In some places, still

quite limited, parents and citizens are directly involved in the critical areas of decision making: program, budget, and personnel.

Some Examples of School/Community Interactions

In the survey by the Council of the Great City Schools, almost all listed Citizen Advisory Councils as one mode of school/community relations. These were, for the most part, those mandated by federal programs. In most communities this means that there is more than one such Council; too often, more than one at a given school. There will also be councils at the district or system wide level. In a recent study by Don Davies for the Institute for Responsive Education, these councils were characterized as too often empty gestures raising false hopes. At best, he says, the letter of the law and not the spirit of participation prevails. Because little is done to make the participatory channels work, they actually may be increasing citizen alienation and frustration. What appears clear in most of the surveys and visits is the need for closer coordination between these various councils and other parent groups. They must not become "orchestrated" by the local school personnel or the council will not provide the critical look at the way funds are being allocated that was intended in their creation.

There continue to be citizen initiated groups in many communities. The survey by the Council of Great City Schools lists at least 25 systems that mention such groups. The site visits confirmed another conclusion of Davies in relation to groups of this type as opposed to the traditional PTA or government-mandated organizations--these groups are often more aggressive and more demanding on the school personnel so that they can become more accountable to their clients.

What was found encouraging, in at least some of the cities visited, was a new view on the part of the school/administration as to the value of citizens' groups. There was also an effort to change the attitudes and approach of the school people. The most extensive involvement of citizens, both formal and informal, was found in Dallas especially in relation to their desegregation plan.

Another example of citizen involvement should be mentioned for it may provide a key to the future of city schools. In Atlanta, a group of white middle and upper class parents have organized the Northside Parents organization with the purpose of persuading white parents to return their children to the public schools. While the movement is still small, close to 500 students are believed to now be back in the schools. More than 1,000 parents did attend the exhibition in 1976, with close to 2,000 the following year, to hear about the schools. With the racial composition of most urban schools at least 50 percent black, the only way to change that proportion may be to find more white parents who want to return to the city and put their children in public schools.

Another area where schools seemed to be finding new relationships was in collaboration with community agencies. In Oakland, for example, the Chabot Science Center and the Museum School are outstanding examples of how community cultural and science resources can be made available to students. The new Art Center in Milwaukee is a similar example. In Atlanta, students regularly attend classes at the High Museum. There is also a Children's Center program on the campus of Merritt College that extends the school for children in Oakland.

Judged a little less successful, but still possessing the potential of impacting school programs through social services are the Kennedy Center in Atlanta and the Nathan Hale Center in Toledo. The ways to integrate more fully the social services which are housed in the same building with a middle school as is found in the Kennedy Center are still evolving.

Community schools, somewhat differently defined, were found in most of the cities visited. Coordination between the programs of the community schools and regular schools continues to be a major difficulty in achieving the promised goal of this movement.

There was also found an increase in volunteers working in the schools as well as for the schools. At least fourteen of the systems surveyed specifically mentioned programs involving volunteers. One report, however, states that the volunteers still tend to come primarily from the upper income groups. In most of the cities, the need for the unpaid volunteer was supported.

In Atlanta, a new position was created with the help of CETA funds to help schools bridge the distance between the schools and their communities. The Student Service Assistant works with the school principal and staff in the school where he/she is assigned to define the exact nature of their responsibilities. Some do more with the teachers in planning programs and providing an outlet for children with temporary difficulties; others visit parents to find out if there are ways the schools can be more helpful.

Another innovation found in the Atlanta visit was the way in which the system is organized in the area of community relations. The division was originally created by the Court order desegregating the schools in 1973. Since that time it has expanded to include not only the more traditional public and community relations but also personnel services, social and psychological, and all services for the handicapped and special education. Furthermore, by providing a "hot line," it attempts to serve as an ombudsman for the community seeking answers to any and all questions. The Division is headed by Dr. Barbara Whitaker, a former social worker with a doctorate in educational administration.

Perhaps the most exciting new development in school/community interaction is the expanded role the business community organized. This was particularly striking in Atlanta and Dallas.

In Atlanta, while there is a variety of new ventures between the schools and business community through the alternatives, the Interagency Council established at the Carver High School is of particular interest. Here the principal, Dr. Norris Hogans, the state representative from the area, David Scott, and leaders of the businesses located in the immediate vicinity of the school as well as from the city at large, (Georgia Power for example) have come together in a formal organization. Through this Council business and school people plan together. Internships have been created for high school students that pay for work in real life work situations. This program goes far beyond the traditional vocational education program and is an example of career education at its best.

In Dallas, part of the impetus for a changed and more involved role of the business community came as a result of the Court order for desegregation. The Chamber of Commerce assumed a leadership role along side the schools "to mobilize resources, people, time, and money to accomplish peaceful and smooth implementation of this very significant decree" quoted from a booklet published by the Chamber of Commerce detailing the various activities and involvement of businesses with schools. Hundreds of business men and women were involved and coordinated by the Dallas Chamber of Commerce and the Dallas Citizens Council. Because of the leadership of the school superintendent, Dr. Nolan Estes, and the school board, and the support of both business and larger community, the Dallas desegregation plan was implemented without the violence and hostility found in many other communities. It is hoped that once the community has become involved with the schools, the participation will continue in the future.

While examples of business community involvement were not as extensive in the other cities visited, all have some examples. In Oakland, California, the Castlemont High School is part of the Adopt-A-School program with the Clorox Corporation making sizeable financial contributions to the programs of the schools. Such a relationship does raise a question, however, of what will happen to these programs if the outside funding ceases. In Milwaukee, Partners at Lincoln, is another example of business cooperating with the school district. Here the Bell Telephone Company provides resources and personnel to the Lincoln High School for tutoring, scholarships, equipment and OJT opportunities.

In several of the communities, not only Atlanta, there was evidence that the court has played an influential role in determining educational policy. In Milwaukee, the Court order took cognizance of the committee

of 100 who helped in drafting the plan. The site visiting team recommended that the committee continue with a broadened mission. Dallas has already been mentioned. In Toledo, by contrast, there was little evidence of citizen involvement and the court had not ordered such organization. More tension was visible complicated by the failure to pass several mileage raises. The schools were finally closed for several weeks which may have contributed to passage the last time it was proposed.

The Future of School/Community Interaction

What of the future of school/community interaction in the 70's? There will certainly be a continuation of the government-mandated advisory councils along with the parent-teacher organizations that have existed for many years. What will be important in the future, however, is the degree to which schools and communities will seek a new consensus on the roles of these groups especially in the essential areas of program, budget, and personnel. If schools are to make a difference in those communities where too many children are still leaving school unprepared for the complex world in which they must live, there must be greater cooperation between the school/home/community. All must seek to talk the same language. A sense of community, where mutual respect for the values and beliefs of all exists, seems essential for schools to be able to accomplish the purposes society has set for them. School personnel must be trained in many ways to feel comfortable with their communities and to learn how to respond to new voices.

A second promising area for further interaction is between the business communities and schools. Most such leaders now recognize that a good school system is vital to the future of their interests and continued growth of their cities. They also will profit if more young

people graduate with saleable skills. A caution is required, however, so that business will not assume responsibilities that should rightfully belong to the schools so that promising programs cease when outside funding is no longer available.

Since schools cannot provide all services, there will continue to be a need for schools to work with other community agencies. The model of Atlanta's Kennedy School is only one possible way to coordinate social services to better serve students and their families. What is important is to find a means of coordinating the various efforts.

Underlying any and all of these activities of school/community interaction must be the philosophical veiw that schools do belong to their communities; that school personnel must both lead and respond to the values expressed by the communities of their schools. Understanding the dynamics of the community should be the first order of business for the school administrator and staff.

At the same time, the community must assume its responsibility and support the schools while making sure they are providing the services desired. There is no one pattern of community involvement. But there should be evident the basic principle of a democratic society which states that people should be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Nothing affects the lives of people more than the education of their children. Therefore, educators must understand that they hold the lives of these children in trust and must be alert to the values and beliefs of the community they serve. By creating open channels of communication, schools and their communities can reach consensus about what schools should do and how. With this consensus, the chances of children living more productive and happy lives are greatly increased.